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Security Council

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Letter dated 4 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that, under the presidency of the United States of America, the Security Council will hold a briefing on United Nations peacekeeping on Thursday, 6 April 2017. In order to help to steer the discussion on the subject, the United States has prepared the attached concept note (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Nikki **Haley**
Ambassador
United States Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 4 April 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept paper

Thematic debate: Peacekeeping operations review

Overview

United Nations peacekeeping is the most powerful — and most high-profile — instrument the Security Council has at its disposal to fulfil its responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Council has long grappled with how to increase peacekeeping effectiveness, with discussions commonly based around operational reforms necessary to strengthen the role, capacity, effectiveness, accountability and efficiency of the United Nations system in executing peacekeeping mandates.

With this debate, the United States of America proposes that Security Council members instead focus on the aspect of peacekeeping reform related to the political foundations necessary for the success of peacekeeping missions, including whether the mandated tasks and overall concept of the mission are consistent with political realities on the ground. We encourage Council members to consider whether current peacekeeping operations continue to be the best-suited mechanisms for meeting the needs of those on the ground and achieving the Council's political objectives, or if changes are needed. That is, are current missions still "fit for purpose?" With ever-increasing demand on the United Nations and its Member States to provide such capabilities, the Council must carefully consider whether the conditions still exist for these missions to be successful and, if not, what needs to change. For the United Nations to meet the security challenges of the future, it must work today to complete the tasks for its missions from the past. Council members authorizing these missions owe it to the personnel that they send into harm's way to ensure that their bravery is not wasted, nor their tasks impossible.

Briefer

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres

Key questions

Instead of placing the focus of this debate on operational issues such as peacekeeper conduct and discipline or problems with training and equipment — all important in their own right — Security Council members are encouraged to review missions, identify areas in which mandates no longer match political realities and propose alternatives or paths towards restructuring to bring missions more in line with achievable outcomes. Questions to consider include:

- What should the Council do in situations where there is no political process to support? What if the missions serve a valuable protection role, but without any conceivable conclusion to this role?

- Can the Council better identify a mission's core objective, maintain focus on achieving it and acknowledge when tasks are completed? How do we guard against mission creep?
- Is it advisable, or even possible, to operate a mission without the strategic consent of the host Government? What commitments should a host Government be required to accept when the Council authorizes a mission? What commitments should the Council expect of countries hosting United Nations peace operations where the United Nations is helping the Government to establish its authority throughout its territory, such as in Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic or Somalia?
- How long should the Council wait before re-examining the value of a mission when the political process breaks down? Would it be beneficial to institutionalize the inclusion of clear exit strategies in every mission's mandate? What should the Council do to ensure that parties to a conflict that are engaged in peace processes have stronger incentives to reach agreement that will allow the United Nations to withdraw its mission?
- Which specific missions need this kind of attention, and how should the Council address them? Are there alternatives to peacekeeping operations we should be considering in these cases?

Background

As at 31 January 2017, there were 99,034 uniformed personnel, including 85,408 troops and 12,786 police, serving in the 16 peacekeeping operations overseen by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, with an approved budget of $7.87 billion. United Nations peacekeeping is a vital aspect of the Organization. However, a significant number of peacekeeping operations have mandates conceived years ago — and in some cases decades ago — that are no longer supported by a political environment conducive to achieving the Security Council's aims. It is crucial that missions contribute to increased safety and security, but they can also create a subsidized and unsteady peace, which can quickly become a dependency that discourages long-term solutions. The United Nations becomes trapped in these frozen conflicts, and peacekeeping missions that were initially conceived to provide temporary security to allow space for political solutions to take hold instead deploy for years without clear mandates or exit plans.

Although the operational aspects of peacekeeping often draw the most attention, the Security Council has also recognized the importance of an underlying political process as a foundation for United Nations peacekeeping. For example, in its 2009 presidential statement on peacekeeping (S/PRST/2009/24), the Council recognized "the need to weigh the full range of responses when addressing a situation which may endanger international peace and security, and to deploy UN peacekeeping missions only as an accompaniment, not as an alternative, to a political strategy". And of course, the central finding of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations report (S/2015/446) is that "protection mandates must be realistic and linked to a wider political approach". However, we have not always followed through on this commitment to ensure that our peacekeeping missions continue to maintain a strong political foundation.

Outcome

While no product is envisioned, we encourage the Security Council to apply the lessons and methods discussed in this meeting to our regular mandate review process to ensure that conditions still justify the missions and that political processes conceivably lead towards realistic, achievable solutions.